As part of Mariposa County’s celebration of National Trails Day on June 4, 2022 the Arts Council invited the community to enjoy live poetry readings, compose original poems and create artwork in response to prompts that explored personal feelings and experiences with America’s trails, waterways and wild spaces. Trails Day Poetry received over 100 submissions of unique poems written by community members of all ages. This chapbook is curated by poet Megan Levad Beisner.

This special project was created in alignment with the Mariposa County Creative Placemaking Strategy, leveraging the arts to engage public spaces and recreation.
“Once, we were part of Outside and Outside was part of us.” This is the opening line of one of our toddler son's recent favorite books, a meditation on how intimately our lives are connected to the natural world, even if we forget to spend time with it. Here in Mariposa County, it's not hard to remember how much our environment affects us—we live with fires and rockslides, drought and toxic algae. But we also live with spectacular superblooms, everyday wildlife sightings, and some of the oldest trees on the planet.

Our intimacy with nature, I think, is a major component of the glue that binds our close community. Whatever our differences, we always have this in common; we share the views and the stars—and the trails.

Trails Day was an awesome celebration of what it means to live and grow together here, and this chapbook memorializes this moment in our life together at the hem of the Sierras. As you read, you'll see poems that remind you of your own childhood, the meditations you've had in middle life, and the hopes you hold for our shared future.

As for my hopes? They include helping to bring more contemporary poets like Michael Mlekoday to Mariposa to read to and talk with us (their riff on Robert Hass's "Meditation at Lagunitas" is a refreshing moment of delight), meeting more of the warm, determined people making Mariposa an amazing place to live through their hard work with small-but-mighty organizations, and discovering more trails with my family.

(Spoiler alert: Outside is always there, waiting for us to enter.)
Rhythm, Rhizome, Hymn Trails
inviting us, life.

Rhythm, Rhizome, Hymn Trails
guiding us, the way.

Rhythm, Rhizome, Hymn Trails
connecting us, to all that is

Rhythm Rhizome Hymn

My kind of trail is also
A story, a river
It’s not a straight line.
It takes me where others have gone
So I can go my own way

Repetition may be needed
Before what is outside
Becomes inside.

My kind of trail is both,
at the same time
known, and a path of discovery
shared, but still mine.

Better for being shared
Better for being mine
Leading me on,
Outward and within
To get in touch
With what matters.

Once, I’d swiftly stride
over high mountain passes.
Now, pause, gaze in awe.

Walking the trail
a light rain falling

I close my eyes
sacrificing sight
letting touch take over
- each drop a cold landing
patterning a melody
calling the skin
to attention

The drops collect until
gravity wills them into
rivulets running down
the broad plain of my
forehead
checked briefly
by the brow’s bushy dams
their flow channeled
to either side
of my
nose

Across the hilly cheeks
down the jaw’s sharp swoop
down the neck and
down

Fanning out
on the chest’s
broad delta
reaching the heart
- finally watering
the center
of my
soul
Returning to the poems of Robert Hass after gorging on wild blackberries by the sea, bright and sagey, our fingers staining the pages - is it always like this, this silent, creaturly singing?

Michael Mlekoday

Sea is dark and deep
Couldn't jump in as a girl
I dive in and laugh

Michelle Ceballos

Down in Isla Vista
I can feel the ocean breeze
When I learn new things

Canyon Carter
Student
On the Coast

Rafting is so fun
Water rushing around you
Observe the current

Xander
Student

The creek at my house
the fish i can't seem to catch
My hands gauge, but miss

Tillyanna Healey
10th Grade
Missed Opportunities

The river flows down people
Swim down the river the
Rocks stay in place

Elvis
Student

Familiar trials
Reassuring nostalgia
Rippling comfort

Liam Willis
Student

Once were soaring pines
Now transformed to rocks grass oaks
A desert with trees

Chris Hutcheson

Branches reach wider,
The meadow more lush, in my
dreams that brought me here

Carol Dewey

That field of dreams
Widely opened my young eyes
New kids live there now.

K. Amstutz
I have returned from a natural landscape before, it was even in my property. I was on a hike with my family just exploring around my house then, we saw an opening in the bushes leading to smoke that was rising from an ice pond. That day I felt something different, and I’m still not sure why I felt like that.

The large playful tree That has been a home not home Turned to a small thought

The creek it was a wild place the creek when I was six brambles, tadpoles quicksand! In my mind. But then when I returned my creek, my wild creek was gone Buried in a culvert beneath a vast green lawn.

I was four years old when my brother was two years old We were playing in the pond trying to catch tadpoles Me and him went back there when I was 10 and he was 8 We kinda just chilled for a little but didn’t play in the pond because we felt too old to play in the pond.

I walked up the trail. Then I spotted a scrub jay I walked back to school

I saw a rope swing tied to a big tree branch But we could not swing

Poppies in lupines On Mariposa Parkway A cordial display
Evelyn Carter  
Student

Past is forgotten  
in endless sound, shadows dance  
In nature's poem.

Caroline Wenger Korn  

Our buckeye tree waiting  
Hoping all these lonely years  
And then you come home

Ben Goger  

Smile on me songbird, the winds going to blow  
all the pedals from the flowers, into the rainbow  
The light is the same, from east to the west  
Under flat moon light is the best

To the highlands in springtime, is where I'm going to go  
Following ribbons of woodsmoke up wet grant flows  
Discussing with the elders all the ancient typologies  
Under flat moon light if you please

Listen to the dreaming of the ants and bees  
Echoing reptiles beyond realities  
Songliness in the sunrise, spirits in the trees  
Under flat moonlight if you please

Maegan Matchett  
10th Grade

A big rock above  
head in the clouds of the sky  
She sits on the ledge

Jim Cokas  
Song Dogs

out under a laguna moon  
bright full sphere cough in a pacific sky

walking the trail on a pleistocene beach  
now humped up and fringed with sage

watching an owl fly  
soundless feathered kite  
pursuing the scurries of mice  
in some black dance

in the dry cities of autumnal weed  
cricket songs emerge and smother our hearing for a time

then at the edge of all listening  
comes the voice of an old man laughing  
no, a child wailing  
now forward now backward

a river reaches uphill

i feel as if i am dreaming  
in a language i have forgotten
This forest floor
Littered with death and life
Of so many ages past and present
Layer upon layer
Energy upon energy
A microcosm and yet a universe
Feathered, furred and scaled,
Ferned, mossed and flowered
Here we are brother and sisters,
of millennials unimaginable
Within each the stuff
Of stardust and dinosaurs
The mark of a Greater Existence
A beauty abused
Whatever the future
Time “grinds exceeding fine”
And change is a forever given within any forest
Of water, of growth
Of heat and frost
Of millions upon millions of years yet ahead
Breathe slowly
Breathe deeply
For here the breath of life surrounds the willing soul.

I dream of a world so cleansed
That you can almost see -
through it. I dream of a
world where the ocean is
plastic free

I dream of a sunny
day where young
kids can play
in the rivers.

I hope that all of these
will come true.

Do we as people see what our choices do?
Do we as a society acknowledge that what we choose to do has a consequence?
We've all been told the Iconic but old fashioned line, that “Your actions have consequences.”

When the teacher asked if we Understand we all solemnly shook our head in agreement. What does that question actually mean? Do only big actions have consequences or do small choices matter as well? I wish to Have generations following us to not have to question this idea of consequence.
I wish that the next generations can live as though consequences is an unneeded worry.

Plentiful water
Quenching parched California,
Defeating the fire demons . . .

Oceans without debris
Plastic free
Abundant with sea life and Coral reefs . . .

Air clear and clean
Easy to breathe
No purifiers needed . . .

Silent vehicles emitting nothing Harmful,
Instead replenishing the Atmosphere . . .

People living with care reestoring our world,
Returning the climate to Its friendly status

I so wish.
Chris Hutcheson

Long ago homosapiens became the lone species in genus Homo. (It is said we likely ate the others)

When WWII regalia Carmel poet mused:
“The winds from across the pacific smell of war.”

He imagined a world without humans. A world dominated by another species Raccoons! (they have opposable thumbs) Raccoons are cunning, selfish, greedy, nasty.

It would be the same. Imagine no domination but coexistence.

What a dream!

Patrick C.
Student

We experience a duality of nature. The tranquil calm of an old-growth forest, where all feels cyclical, suddenly stands in contrast with our knowledge of its inevitable end. The decaying on the forest floor, so life giving despite its origins, is unlike our greater decay. Our ending of the cycle.

Jessie-Lee Bissell
6th Grade

I found myself wandering over to the place I developed at The snowy, beautiful landscape it doesn't feel the same. Like all of the memories are gone It looks the same, but anything I ever enjoyed is different. Is this the same place I grew up in?

Shasta Conner
Student

The flowing river A memory of happiness Now filled with endless fear

Aaron Newman
Student

Fighting with Ourselves

If you want to choose you can The pain of change will never compare to the beauty of your future.

If you need to change don't blind yourself in lies. Change is beautiful but you are not the price.

Caroline Wenger Korn

I dream of a world where people are nice. Where kids don't just stay on video games all day. Where there is no trash In the oceans and rivers. I dream of a world where it doesn't matter what color skin you are.
I dream a world larger than imagination
I dream a world of multiple worlds
I dream a world that contains multiple stars
I dream a world with ongoing discovery
I dream a world beyond human capability
I dream the universe.

Pria Wellcome
Student
The Universe

Trees, rocks, clean water.
Animals, coyotes, bears,
Hope for no fire.

Jacob Griffith
6th Grade

In a new world
There are wildflowers blooming
By the clean river flowing,
In a new world
There are children
Running with uncontrollable laughter
In our world
There will be kindness
Spreading in the wind of our population.

In a New World

What if... there was a place for gathering of histories of people who shared a common goal: to reach heaven-on-earth kind of feeling every glorious day?

What if we could close our eyes and feel the cloud - shade and mountain sun pass over our upturned faces while feeling the generations of ancestors who have travelled here, too under the same warm sun?

What if the air could be so calm and still, that all we could hear would be ancient bubbles rising from deep, deep within the Earth's secret places . . . and the killdeer, luring us away from the newly hatched children as they have practiced for millenia?

What if humans could work with a place to construct a shelter that belongs here, where tiny frogs and humans could gather and share ideas and connect under a well built roof, dreaming of a world where all, can thrive?

What if it was perfect?
But your perfect is not mine and mine is not yours
This world can be many Things of amazing experience of the highest mountains and the lowest valleys. We will always come back home to the mountains and trees.

K. Amstutz

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Parsons 2022

Lily Rumfelt
Student
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